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We Parade with Pride!

by ***bisscoito***

Growing up in a religious household kept Gulye from truly knowing himself. His mother was a devoted follower of King Coltzan, whose teachings held that pride was a sin — or often, the root of all sin. For a long time, Gulye grew up surrounded by a way of life built on denial, especially the denial of who he truly was.

From an early age, he was taught to focus solely on goals meant to secure a promising future: study until exhausted, land a good job, and become an honourable man. He never felt comfortable sharing his dreams with his eight siblings, especially given their humble background, which offered few opportunities to get ahead.

Though his teenage years passed without major trouble — quiet, even somewhat monotonous — he realised early on just how different he was from the boys around him. He shared their love of sports, their heroic ambitions, and their mischievous streak; nothing unusual there. But whenever the conversation turned to girls, Gulye always found a way to change the subject.

Handsome, well-mannered, and exceptionally bright, he was constantly surrounded by young women, yet he never showed the slightest interest in romantic relationships with them. During family nights in front of the television, watching soap operas and series, he found the romantic scenes on screen rather… uninteresting. Meanwhile, his mother and sisters would be moved to tears, swept up by the passionate kisses and heartfelt expressions of the actors.

At his high school prom, when he was nearly sixteen, his feelings hadn't changed at all. He was approached by Nabile, one of the most beautiful girls in his class and widely considered the most desirable young woman in the school. To Gulye, she talked too much, her strong rose perfume bothered him, and her full figure felt uncomfortable when they embraced. Claiming he was coming down with a cold, he left early. Once safe in his room — only after taking a long shower to wash away her scent and brushing his teeth thoroughly to rid his mouth of any trace of her — he lay in bed and cried, wondering what was wrong with him.

Months earlier, his father had begun replacing his warm smiles with sidelong glances, uneasy with his youngest son's changing behaviour. He would often remark that Gulye was too playful for a boy, or too restless, or too serious. His father also remembered how, as a small child, Gulye had always preferred games and activities that were labelled "for girls." "It's just childhood whims, dear, he'll grow out of it", his mother would say, trying to soothe her husband, who disliked what he saw as a delicate nature — a nature that was now becoming more visible as Gulye grew older.

Throughout his upbringing, they corrected him over the smallest things. "Hey, big guy, men don't sit like that!", "What kind of clothes are those? Real men don't wear colours like that!", "Gulye, son, behave like a proper young man!" and little by little, these comments planted chaos in his mind, and he grew into an adult burdened by trauma and obsession, desperate to appear as masculine as possible.

Fortunately, he was able to leave that toxic, restrictive environment as soon as he graduated high school and was accepted into the Kreludor University of Aerospace Science and Robotics. His time living in college fraternities helped break down moral barriers he hadn't even realised had been built around him. It is well known that university campuses are places of discovery, filled with liberal ideas and new experiences. It was in this setting that Gulye met Motor, his roommate, and quickly developed a deep affection for him. Whenever they crossed paths, whether in the dorms or university hallways, Gulye felt an overwhelming sensation in

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the pit of his stomach and in his chest.

To Gulye, Motor was fascinating: outgoing, independent, and incredibly self-reliant. His sense of freedom was magnetic. Gulye admired how spontaneous and full of life his new friend was, doing exactly what he wanted each day without caring what others thought. Motor was also a dedicated intellectual, an active member of the debate club, and a top student in political science. He dreamed of becoming a representative, hoping to build a fairer, more equal country for everyone — Neopets and machines alike. Gulye couldn't understand why he was so eager to praise Motor from the moment they met, or why he couldn't get him out of his head. "Stay away from that young man, that is an order!", High Priest Antor, a longtime family friend, told him during a confession.

And he tried — he truly, honestly tried. But the more he resisted, the more Motor filled his thoughts and his daydreams. Then, one night, while lost in a moment of self-indulgence, Gulye caught himself thinking about Motor for the first time. It was a shock when he realised what it meant: he desired another man. He was terrified as he recalled Antor's words from the previous Sunday's sermon: the gods might forgive many things, but they abhorred any man who lay with another man. He had been taught this since he was a child, that being gay was something to be despised.

Coming from a respectable family, someone who had always supported his congregation's religious work, sung in the choir, and taken part in countless events for young believers — from spiritual retreats to grand celebrations of faith — being labeled as an outsider, as "one of the wolves rather than one of the sheep" as the most conservative members of the community put it, led him to make a reckless decision. Terrified of losing the salvation he had been taught to crave, he told his parents the truth.

At first, they said nothing. "Pray, my son. Pray that the gods show you the way", they told him. And for days, that is exactly what he did. Then, one Saturday, High Priest Antor and a small group of followers came to collect him from his parents' home. They invited him to a special meeting that same day, promising they had all the answers he needed. Hoping the great gods had heard his prayers and sent this pious man to help him, Gulye packed a small bag in just a few minutes and climbed into a dark, ominous-looking van. Every instinct deep inside him screamed to run away, but he ignored it. He told himself that fear was just sin trying to stop him from experiencing a true, miraculous transformation. He did not want to be a sinner. He did not want to bring shame to his family.

The truth is, when news outlets report on conversion centres across Neopia, funded by religious organisations, they never fully describe what actually happens inside their walls. Not even the most imaginative reporter could picture the reality of the sessions that take place there. But Gulye knows — unfortunately, he knows all too well.

He spent three months locked away in that hellhole. Three months that felt like years. They gave him only one meal a day, claiming it was to keep his flesh from becoming too strong. He was kept isolated in a dark, dirty room. Cold showers were mandatory every morning at sunrise, intended to purify his body. Women were brought in to see him, saying they had been chosen by the gods to teach him how to appreciate female company. At the end of each day, they would cut his skin so that his sins could flow out with his blood. By the end of the first week, Gulye no longer wanted salvation; he wanted death. He wanted to close his eyes and wake up from that nightmare. He was exhausted, humiliated, and too weak to even breathe properly. All of this because he loved another man — a feeling they told him was forbidden.

When his confinement ended, Priest Antor returned him to his family and declared him a lost cause. "You didn't even try, my boy!" His father didn't care to hear about what had happened there or that his youngest son had been abused by cruel people. His mother also paid no attention to how thin and malnourished he looked, with his bones sticking out sharply beneath his skin. The family's reputation came first. Without hesitation, they threw him out. They could accept Kimbar, his older brother, who was lost in the criminal underworld of Darigan. They could tolerate Suzane, his middle sister, who did goodness-knows-what on the streets of Meridell for spare change — because at least she helped put food on the table. But Gulye, who loved men? That was too much.

Even so, he forgave them. Can you believe it? He loved them; they were his parents, after all. He went back to finish his studies and decided to finally embrace his desires, tired of running from his own feelings. And as he had suspected, the first time he was with Motor was breathtaking. He had kissed many girls before, but none had ever made him feel so deeply, so completely consumed. If it was wrong, Gulye decided right then that every second of it would be worth it.

He turned eighteen, then twenty, and suddenly, thirty. He earned a degree in physics, completed a postgraduate certificate in nuclear engineering, finished his master's, and then his

quite a reputation for affluence, where only the most elite of Neopians dine with regularity.

by halondrus

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doctorate. By then, he was already well respected among scientists across Kreludor. He had achieved the three main goals from his list with impressive speed: he had completed his education, secured a dignified job, and built a stable life. Yet, he still felt incomplete. Something was missing.

To King Coltzan, pride was wrong, wicked, and vile. To Gulye, however, it was the highest form of achievement. Pride is what you feel when you look back at the path you have walked, the obstacles you have overcome, and the battles you have won. It is the certainty of your own strength and the knowledge that the hard, painful process of forging your character was exactly what you needed to become someone who knows they are capable of anything. That is pride. And that was the pride they could never take away from him. It was the pride that Priest Antor, his parents, and King Coltzan had feared — because it was the very thing that made him invincible. And now, Gulye carried that pride as he marched — marching for himself, for everyone who had not yet found their own pride, and for all those who would one day find it.

He realised, too late, that there are cruelties and hardships in life born of malice and small-mindedness. But the worst, most unforgivable violence of all is the violence we inflict upon ourselves when we refuse to let ourselves be who we truly are. Today, wearing a beautiful rainbow-colored blazer he had bought affordably on NeoBay, a pair of Neo-Star shoes, and his face painted in the colours of the gay pride flag, he stepped down from the Kreludor comet where he lives to attend the great parade in Neopia Central. He was ready to keep the promise he had made to himself long ago: to march with pride.

He deserved it. He had always deserved it.

The End.

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